

This was the final project for the Ethnomusicology 20C (Musical Cultures of the World: Asia) course, taught by Professor Katherine In-Young Lee in Fall 2020 at UCLA. Students worked in groups to research and conduct an oral history with one of seven musicians who also served as a guest lecturer for the course. Each of the narrators are highly esteemed musicians with long professional careers in music performance. They also serve as important liaisons between their home countries in East, South, and Southeast Asia and the United States.

Profile of Supeena Insee Adler

In an interview by Lilia Yaralian, Isabel Dobrev, and Alexander Marshall, interviewee Dr. Supeena Insee Adler discusses her origins in music, her career in Thai music, and her experience in the UCLA Ethnomusicology program at UCLA. Dr. Adler is a Thai musician and ethnomusicologist who lives in San Diego, California. She is a multi-instrumentalist and specializes in traditional stringed instruments including the hammered dulcimer and the jakhee, a three-stringed Thai zither. Both performing and teaching classical Thai music, Dr. Adler also repairs and restores the Thai instrument collection in the World Musical Instrument Collection at UCLA.

Dr. Adler grew up in a family that loved listening to music; she brought this love with her to high school when the opportunity arose to participate in multiple ensembles. Participating in several music competitions in Thailand, Dr. Adler realized that she can establish a steady occupation for herself within the field. She received her B.F.A. in Thai Classical Music from Mahasarakham University, then pursued a M.A. in Musicology in Thailand. Dr. Adler then arrived in the United States and received her M.A. in Southeast Asian Studies: Text, Ritual and Performance (SEATRiP) and Ph.D. in Music (Ethnomusicology) at the University of California, Riverside.

Oral History Interview Transcript: Dr. Supeena Insee Adler

Lilia Yaralian: Hi, I'm Lilia Yaralian —

Alexander Marshall: Hi, I'm Alexander Marshall.

Isabel Dobrev: I'm Isabel Dobrev.

Supeena Adler: Hello, I'm Supeena Insee Adler.

LY: — and we are the interviewers and we are interviewing Dr. Supeena Insee Adler, she's our narrator. Hi Dr. Adler, how are you doing?

SA: Hi, I'm doing fine, how about you guys?

LY: Doing good!

AM: Pretty well.

LY: We want to thank you again so, so much for taking the time to speak with us today.

SA: Of course, yeah.

LY: Today's date is Sunday, November 29, 2020 and it is 12pm P.S.T. We are recording this interview via Zoom, and Dr. Adler, Isabel, Alexander and I are all currently in California. This is our oral history project for Ethnomusicology 20C, where we will learn more about Dr. Adler and Thai music. This interview will be deposited in the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive and at Archive.org. So let's jump into the first question.

LY: Dr. Adler, did your career aspirations ever change when growing up, and if so, how do you think those changes influenced and affected where you currently are right now in your career?

SA: Oh my god. That's gonna be a 40-years-long — *[laughing]* Well, I mean I like playing music. I like playing music, I like listening to music, and my family also likes to listen to all kinds of music. And when I went to school - high school, let's say high school - we had multiple ensembles - marching band, we have a Thai traditional music group, we had a angklung group, we had other kinds of activities that relate to music and dance, which I participated in those ensembles - I liked it. At first, I didn't think these kinds of activities could lead to a career, you know, just because it's also part of the social stigma that many people in Thailand still believe that this kind of career is not gonna support you enough for you to survive. You know, *[being a]* musician is not really a "thing" over there. So that's from my family's point of view, basically. But when I met with great teachers, they gave me different ideas how I can improve, how I can pursue my career further. So I actually attended several music competitions in Thailand, so that actually opened my mind and I saw that many people are making a living by doing music *[laughing]*. You know, not just playing, but also,

you know, organizing it, doing other kinds of activities that relate to music. So, it also gave me the idea that hey, if I'm unable to, you know, become a soloist or something like that, I could, somehow, do something else because I still like to listen to the music, play music, and [be] involved with the music activities. So, in my — before you enter the college, what do you call it here? Like, six years into high school, and then you go into the college - what is that gap? It's a different system here, so I don't know how you call it. Like, you have to take the test, S.T. —

ID: S.A.T.

SA: — S.A.T. test or something like that. In Thailand you have six years before you can go in. Elementary school: six years, high school: six years, and then going to college. For myself, I only completed five years and got a special certificate and then I attended college. So I jumped one year - I skipped one year - and went to college and pursued my career in Thai music traditional performance. That's my goal. I still think that music can make money, music can make me happy, and music can actually help the society. And I can be with my friends as well [laughing]. So, you're still asking whether it's changed, or not, so I would say - not much. Because I still want to be involved even though I'm not performing it myself, but I still want to be involved. So after I graduated from my undergrad, a B.F.A in music traditions from Thailand — so I pursued my M.A. in Thailand in musicology. After I completed my classwork, I moved to America, I went to UC Riverside, pursuing M.A. in Southeast Asian Studies: Text, Ritual and Performance. And at the same time prepared myself for a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology. So, it's not changed yet! It's not changed yet [laughing]. Another thing that I miss the most though is performing with a friend, or teachers in Thailand. Because we were always with friends, we were always with a big group of people who [were] playing music and dancing all together. So, here I started a group of — tried to get people to play music with me, [laughing] in any way. So we can talk some more about that. So to answer your question very shortly — I think that my goal has never changed. My goal has never changed. It's always expanding, but it's always involving music and other activities that relate to music.

LY: Thank you so much!

ID: Thank you, Dr. Adler. That was really interesting. So, moving onto the next question; from your perspective, what are the most important aspects of performing when playing classical Thai music in a live setting?

SA: Live setting is different, you guys know that! You know, pre-recording is something else, that you can always change, right - you can fix, you can edit stuff. But live performing for Thai traditional music - normally, we're not using notation. Normally we're not using notation. Which means that all performers have to memorize a song [*laughing*], regardless how long it is. And, normally the song may be performed - it's really long, really long. Really long. So, it's nervous and [*laughing*] nerve-wracking any time that you perform on stage, of course. Unless, you perform with the group that you have been rehearsed with together for awhile. So, it's about trust - it's about trust among musicians in the group. So for example, if you accidentally forgot one part, and you're kind of like, able to listen to your friend playing - "Ah! Oh, I know now where I am and how do I jump in". Something like that. So, yes! It is terrifying. Sometimes when you perform alone — I mean, I - once or twice actually - failed on stage. [*laughing*] And I did the solo part - I was like, "Oh, my god! Don't forget, don't forget, don't forget! And, completely blank. [*laughing*] That's happened, and that was a painful experience. That was a painful experience. For me, when I teach students to play, and when they have a chance to perform live, I always be there to support them. Next to the stage, or in front of the stage, singing along, or kind of like, make all kinds of gestures to help them, knowing that they're not alone, and they're able to do it. And that's also — I received that from some of my teachers as well. So they're always supporting me, that's comforting me. And I think that's important, and I want to share that with my students.

ID: Thank you. That's awesome.

AM: I'm curious, what are your main instruments? When —

SA: My main instruments, hm.

AM: — playing classical Thai music.

SA: [*laughing*] Hmm. Oh, yeah. I first fell in love with Thai music because of a movie. [*laughing*] Because of a movie. An actress in the movie played a hammered dulcimer. Lilia—

hammered dulcimer! *[laughing]* And it was so beautiful! I was like a teenager or something. Not before teenager. And I really liked the sound! So I asked the teacher at school. We call it as a club, not a major or minor or anything, it's like a music club. Thai music club, for the high school students. So I asked her, "May I please study the hammered dulcimer?" And she said, "Oh, no. Because it's already full". Not just me who liked to play that music, right. *[laughing]* It's many students *[who]* also want to do that. So, and then she said "No", so I was like "Oh no! I can't do it". And she recommended another kind of musical instrument - it's a three-stringed zither called jakhee. Jakhee. And then she asked me, "Why don't you try that one? And if somebody drops playing hammered dulcimer, if they have a spot open, you can just try it". And then I played the jakhee for several months with a few of my friends. You know, entered together as a club, and joined the club together. Seven of us studied jakhee for several months. It was only me who stayed. It was a painful process because you have to actually use the, this part *[gesturing to the heel of her hand]* of your body to basically turn on the surface of the jakhee. And when you first study, when you first start — it's like when you first study guitar, right. *[laughing]* So you have to develop this blistered part. *[gesturing to fingertips]* Same thing here, same thing here. *[gesturing to the heel of her hand]* But this one is so, so, so hurtful. So hurtful. And the skin peeled off, it's bloody, it's just, ughhh! Yes, I know. And my mom was like, "Why did you even do that!? Why did you even do that?" *[laughing]* Maybe I was addicted to pain, maybe. *[laughing]* So I did that for several months and the teacher decided to teach me some basic melodies, and I was able to play with groups. And I felt better after that. And then, of course, I've already mentioned it - I entered the competitions, which make me practice more, listen more, and it just started from that. So that's my first instruments. And after that, I learned different kinds of musical instruments. Mostly stringed instruments.

AM: Awesome, thank you. That was *[an]* off-the-cusp question but I'm just interested in that. So, I wanna delve into the topic of traditional musical diasporas and how they extend, and how other musical influences can transform that type of music. So within your field of study, have you seen transformations in classical Thai music or Okinawa minyo folk music throughout your time? How have you seen those transformations unfold, if any?

SA: That's gonna take about three days to answer. *[laughing]* It's really long, it's really big. So first of all, I want to just address that in Thailand, there are so many kinds of music performances. So many kinds. Divided by region, sorted by ethnicity, or even in the ritual or

non-ritual, or even when people are just making music. So there's so, so many kinds. The one that I specialize in is traditional Thai music. But I also grew up in Northeast Thailand, where the folk music from Northeast Thailand is very, very present and a very strong influence in my life as well. Also the language that I speak, Thai and Lao - I understand the language - and those also play a big role in the music creativity. Not just in Northeast Thailand, but also throughout Thailand. And I believe that folk music from Northeast Thailand is more popular in America than Thai traditional music. *[laughing]* In terms of Okinawan music, I just picked it up here, when I moved to America actually. I studied - I think this year would be our tenth or something? about ten years — No! actually, it's longer than that because we — Yeah, it's about ten years. *[laughing]* I forgot. So the reason that I started it - so let me talk about this situation very briefly. So the reason that I picked up the Okinawan music - first, is the sound. The sound of the sanshin. I went to a Obon festival in San Diego - the temple, Buddhist temple in San Diego. And they performed the Okinawan music on stage. So I *[was]* drawn by the sound of Okinawan *[music]*. And the melody was so simple - that's what I thought. The melody was so simple and the beat is very upbeat, and pick-up. So I liked it, and after they finished performing, I went to talk to the performers; "Are you offering lessons?" or something like that. *[laughing]* The musician looked at me like, "What?! What?!" *[laughing]* So he never, ever offered any lesson for non-Okinawan people. For non-Okinawan people. And I talked to him and then tried to convince him that I really would like to try, would like to play. So after that, for like a month or something, he invited us to go to his house, and we studied from there. Since then, almost every week we studied with him. In terms of diaspora, something that I found very fascinating is that Okinawan music has a few repertoire that I studied that had the same melody that we used in Thailand. And I was like, "I know that song!" you know, those kinds of moments. "I know that song!" And it's in Thai! So we actually have a really strong, strong connection between Thailand and Japan, actually. Thailand and Japan. So I did a little research about that. So the strongest one that is present in the music is about liquor. It's about liquor. *[laughing]* Exactly! Exactly. *[referencing students' amusement]* It's called "awamori" liquor, which is the rum from Okinawa, Japan, that is made from rice from Thailand. Rice from Thailand. This is like the history - you know - it's believed to be the best wine ever! *[laughing]* Yeah, exactly! *[referencing students' amusement]* And we sing that song - anytime we sing that song, I was just thinking about the situation where many Japanese soldiers in Thailand in Ayutthaya province and, I mean, we have to talk about war and *[laughing]* other stuff that we don't have to talk about that. So, just the situation how, how people get together: so, food, drink, music. Right? *[laughing]* So food,

drink, music. And the situation that sometimes you cannot pick, so you just have to be there. But food, drink, music bringing people together. So, I kind of lost my thought a little bit about Thai music and diaspora. Alex, you are going to frame that question again [*laughing*].

AM: Of course. So basically, I'm just interested [in] how the traditional musical diasporas of like classical Thai music — how did you see that type of music transform throughout your time in the field, if it did transform in any way?

SA: Well recently, recently, I mean five to ten years, that many universities now offer Masters and Ph.D. in Thai music. So, part of their final project is to create new piece, a new performance, which is unprecedented in the past. The creativity for traditional music, it was regarded for the master musician only in the past, but because of the support by government and university and colleges for having M.A. and Ph.D., so allow more people, allow more students to be able to expand their knowledge and try to do something new, which is unorthodox. So, there are so many new pieces that use the same, similar idea. We talk about thao structure in the class [*laughing*], so they also use some kind of those and also use new thought, new melody also influenced by other kinds of music from the south, from the north, from northeast, or even from other countries to incorporate into their new pieces. So, there are a lot of new, new music not just for traditional Thai music; it's also mixed with western musical instruments, which is, you know, not so popular in the past. It's only a few groups that actually performed Thai music melodies on western musical instruments. The other group that [is] very interesting is called Suntaraporn. Suntaraporn is a group of musicians, professional musicians, who used the main melody from Thai traditional music and then add lyrics, composed the new lyrics, like catchy tune, become like a pop song, marching band, and big band. So, they use those kinds of music and use mainly in the military settings and for government events. So, those are new expansions for Thai traditional music in Thai music society.

AM: Awesome thank you so much. I appreciate that.

LY: Dr. Adler, I had a question about how you restored and repaired the Thai music instrument collection in the Ethno Department at UCLA. What kind of skills are needed to repair these delicate instruments and how did you get into the craft of restoring and repairing instruments? That's so amazing!

SA: It is a long story. It is also a lucky story — ending story. So, I first heard about Thai musical instrument at UCLA many, many years ago, but I had no chance to have a look you know just hear that “Oh they have some set of musical instrument there,” but I never had a chance. Then I believe it was the SEMSCSC [*Society for Ethnomusicology Southern California and Hawai‘i Chapter meeting*] many years ago where Professor Helen Rees and Donna Armstrong and Kathleen Hood was presented about the situation of musical instrument at UCLA collection. I think it was Santa Barbara if I’m not mistaken. And part of their presentation was about Thai music that, you know, not being cared for much, so, the condition is not so good. And after their presentation I went to talk to them, offering myself that I can basically fix this, hopefully I can fix them all so if I have a chance to have a look so I can give you an assessment what can be done or what cannot be done or something like that. So, I got lucky, I got super lucky that later on, I mean, almost a year after [*laughing*], so I have a chance to visit the collection. And then I wrote them an assessment, you know, what can be done and later on they allowed me to restore those instruments. But there is also inside story why this set is so important, why this set is so significant because after I have a chance to see the musical instrument there. One of the rammanna, is a flat drums, that I saw has a signature inside and I recognize that signature, so I know whom it belong to, but to make sure so I took a picture and then I send it to Thailand with Facebook, of course right, it's Facebook! Thank you to the advanced technology — to asking descendants of that particular musicians, you know, that name is in that drum, to confirm is this that person’s signature. Immediately, I got a respond “yes” and then my head just like exploded like “Woah! What just going on here?” So and I check all other musical instrument it had a signature inside, different teachers, different master. And then I did some research in the Archive, knowing that where this instrument came from. This came from the prestigious musician from Thailand and David Morton was in Thailand for several years recording these, I mean, the set — recording repertoire before this house actually, what do you call it, moved away from each other so they changed the house. And David Morton was the first foreigner who studied Thai traditional music in Thailand. So, just so many stories that came in to support why this musical instrument set is super significant. It is also because David Morton got the Rockefeller funding to purchase some of the musical instruments from Thailand. It says a long call-and-response letters between him and the descendants of the master musician in Thailand talking about how to get the instrument, how much it costs [*laughing*], and what is required. So there — all kind of this information is still in the library, no sorry in the Archive,

you can do more research on that. So, after that I wrote a short letter to the government through the consulate, actually, to basically asking for their support that we have this significant collection and we need money to fix them, to restore them and also possible to restart the class, and I got super lucky. I went to Thailand, give a lot of presentation about this with many institutions and got supported and so we *[were]* able to raise some money and able to start the class. Yes *[laughing]*, so that is how it come about. There is a lot of time fixing musical instruments, doing research both in Thailand and in the Archive, and then a lot of letters asking for support. And you ask about what kind of skill that required me to do this. So, to fix the musical instrument as part of my studies in Thailand there was one class I recall: Build and Fix Musical Instrument. I mean it should be a fancier word, but that is what it is, so Build and Fix *[laughing]*. Fix your own instrument first, you know. Fix your own instrument and then build, so build new instrument as part of your class requirement. And then we had a special training. So, for myself I got two special training from the Air Force and then Royal Navy, so Thai music divisions, so how to take care of the musical instruments, also how to fix musical instruments, some western instruments, some traditional Thai instruments. Also, I learn a lot by just, you know, being a volunteer teacher here in Escondido Community Center. It's a Thai temple where I also help them to start the school to teach Thai traditional music, language, and other kind of arts form, including hand-carving fruit and vegetables. So, we have the musical instrument, but nobody can fix it, so I also *[laughing]* learn how to fix them as well. And a few friends also asked me to help with their instrument, so I do that. So, yes *[laughing]*. And also, you know, internet is super helpful. Many, many musicians in Thailand doing both: making instruments, playing music, right? So, I have many teachers that I'm still in contact with so if I have some problem, for example, to re-head the drum "how do I do that?" I can't do that because I don't have the tool, right? So, they told me how to do it, so we *[are]* still learning.

LY: That's so amazing, and I actually just thought of a quick follow up question. So, have these skills that you have learned to apply to restoring Thai musical instruments — has this helped with possibly applying this to restoring instruments from other musical traditions —

SA: Oh, yeah.

LY: For example, if I came to you with my Armenian qanun and I said, “Oh, there is something wrong with it,” do you think you know how this could be fixed? Would you be able to?

SA: If, for example, the restring? Yes, I can do it [laughing]. Restring I can do that easily. For the gyil, the Ghanaian xylophone, the one that we had on campus, I also fix them. For the...so many instruments on campus that need basic let's say maintain I would — I already doing that. But basic quick fix, so, yeah, I did that for many instruments, yes, including the [Persian] setar, so I changed the pegs I changed, I mean, make a new peg. For the Japanese collection, I make a new bachi. I fix the biwa. I make the new bridge, so restring them and, yeah, so many things! So many things [laughing]! Yes, and the most complicated one that I have done so far was re-headed the atumpan drums, but that with help from Will Matczynski. He's our Ph.D. student, also specializing in Ghanaian music and he also had some contact with the musician in Ghana who knows how to fix those drums. So, we learn from each other and then I actually fixed them, and they used it for the concert after 20 years of not using them which is, you know...Super happy about that.

LY: That's awesome, thank you so much.

ID: Thank you! What a big project wow —

SA: I know! You should come and, you know, just do it [laughing]. Come and just do it! We have so many broken instruments that I can share with you. We can just kind of like look inside and put it back together.

ID: That's so cool —

SA: Yeah, it's an organology class. That's what I plan to do [laughing], that's what I plan to do! Yeah, yeah.

ID: Yeah, so, you kind of touched on my next question which is about the Loy Krathong festival in Escondido —

SA: Loy Krathong festival —

ID: Yeah?

SA: Yeah, yes, yes, yes!

ID: So, my question is, well, it's about the Thai diaspora in Southern California. So, I'm wondering if you can tell us the experience of how it is to play in the festival and if you feel at home when you're participating in Thai events like this and is the — and how is the experience different in the US than in Thailand?

SA: Sure, yes so first of all I have to mention a little bit of the history of Thai music in the U.S. So, there are — they have a big project from Thailand from Chulalongkorn University, who [*is*] providing volunteer teachers to come to America to teach Thai music and Thai language during the summer first for many years and then this program expanded into the whole year, whole year round. So, students from their — from Thailand in their third or fourth year who specialize in Thai regional music can apply to be a volunteer teacher here. So, we support them with the special visa, not sure what it is called, like a working visa, but they're not really getting money [*because*] it's a volunteer teacher, but we providing them place to stay, health insurance, and food, and of course we pay for their travel, including vacation and tour around the country when they are here. So that's what they receive from us. In return, they have to teach student, I mean they cannot pick student, and it's also depends on which student [*is*] coming in which year, so you cannot really tell them your grade: one grade, two grade, three. It's just whoever showed up, that's what you have to prepare to teach them. So, that start[*ed*] about thirty years ago and the project that I being part of at Escondido, it's also applied from that project. But I help the monks here to contact the organizer in Thailand. We had a different university supply us the volunteer teachers because we do not want to, you know, just kind of like overlap or step over the toe for the other university [*laughing*]. We try to make different channels. So, we got two or three volunteer teachers each year to come to Escondido to help us to teach language and dance and music. Yeah so, I am a part of that. And so, as I mentioned, whoever showed up — so we start from scratch — and sometimes they don't stick around, so they learn for a couple months, and then they're just like, "I'm out!" [*laughing*] And then they come back and they already forgot, so you have to start over again! And that's kind of the dilemma for teaching traditional music and dance to, let's say, non-Native Thai outside of the country. And they're also young. They

come to the temple, mostly not because they want to come, but their parents want them to come. Their parents want them to come to temple, and then to talk in Thai — they can eat food, they can play some music, they can dance, they can play with their friends. So, that's kind of the atmosphere we created at the community center in Escondido. But, compared to Thailand, it's a totally different story. So, when I just first moved here...had a really elegant mind and wanted to share with students what I know, and I wanted to do this, this, this, this, this, but no, none of those are happening, and I was so sad. Why don't people care about this kind of tradition? Why people don't understand it...not even wanting to pay attention or spend time doing it. But, I was totally wrong, cause I only think from my point of view. This thing that I carried with me that's the most valuable thing for me, not for them, and I never thought about that. I [*was*] never wearing their shoes, knowing that "this is not what they want." [*laughing*] This is not what they want. And then I stepped back, stepped back many, many steps, and was just kind of like, "Okay, breathe, breathe..." [*laughing*], and that's when I turned to Okinawan music. Not just because I like the sound. But I also want to learn totally different kind of music that I never experienced before, and how the teacher teach non-Okinawan, to play their traditional music. So I learned a lot from that. Similar situation, the teacher is actually like a really, what do you call — regarded his knowledge, so he's not really share[*ing*] with others, outside of his own community members. But he also takes a risk by teaching us — not just me — my husband and I, teaching us. He also received some criticism from his own teachers, like "why are you sharing this kind of so-called secret knowledge, the knowledge you would not normally share with others, to outsiders." And he just say that "I want to try. We see how it goes." For myself, as a non-Okinawan, when I perform with my teacher, some of the Okinawan actually critique me as well. It doesn't matter how you study, how long you study, you're never going to be one of us — something like that came up. And I was like "Woah, that's harsh. That's not nice to say to someone" [*laughs*], but that's the reality. That's how they think. At first I was super mad, like "Why did you even say these kinds of things to people who are studying music?" [*laughs*], but that's true. That's how they think, that's how they see people who studied their so-called valuable culture — they think that it's valuable for them because they're born into it, they know about it, and outsider would not be able to, so-called appreciate it enough. I did not say anything back, I would just that I like the music, I want to continue playing music, and I'm respecting it, so anytime that I perform, I ask permission from my teacher, so I follow your customs, I follow the cultural expectations of how to study, how to perform, I would not do it without my teachers approval, those kind of things. And at the same time, I was just thinking "Why

people had that kind of feeling that they do not want to share their knowledge to others.” Because they don’t know them. For example, let’s see...the relationship is not there because they don’t know us. So after I talked to several other musicians that perform Okinawan music and told them who we are, how we doing it, and what kind of music background that we had. So, most of them appreciated what we have done, what we are doing, and it also helped to support the Okinawan music in academia. I also started the ensemble at UC Riverside as well for the Okinawan music. So, it’s a different perspective, and that idea also came to my mind, applying that, how I teach music to others. I never ask what kind of background you have, which language you speak, or anything that will [be] preventing them from not studying. I always [am] encouraging them. This kind of music, you learn it, you earn it, it’s yours. And it’s for sharing, it’s for everybody, it’s up to you whether you want to get it or not. It’s up to you. I’m here just to share with you what I know. That’s a kind of long answer [laughs], but it’s actually really, really important in how I conduct my class, or not just class, sharing music with others in America as well.

AM: Alright, so I did some digging into your dissertation...

SA: [laughs]

AM: ...“Music for the Few: Nationalism and Thai Royal Authority.” And in this dissertation, you explored the ideas of musical and traditional gatekeeping in Thai society, and this included the formation of these otherwise highly controlled ensembles of the Thai stringed instruments along with the Javanese oboe by the resisting forces outside of Bangkok. So, if you’re comfortable answering, how was your experience in hearing this music outside of the royal context in that setting, and what were your most valuable takeaways from the completion of your dissertation?

SA: Hm... [laughs], that’s also a really long, long, long answer as well. So, what I’m really happy about [with] the dissertation is that it’s helped to share the knowledge of Thai traditional music from Thailand that many people outside of Thailand did not know about. For example, this ensemble, khruangsai pii chawaa, this one is Javanese oboe with string ensembles, that’s being performed in Thailand but very, very limited setting. Not only the occasions but also the musicians, like who can play, who [is] able to play, who has permission to play this kind of music. And most of the musicians who actually playing this

kind of music and special repertoire for this setting are royal musicians who work for the government directly, and not many of them are outside of this setting, so after years of researching and being with them, I had a chance to study a few repertoires just from this one, but I did not have much chance to perform it because it's no occasion for me, per say, to perform it outside of their group, outside of Thailand, outside of people whom I study with, because of the permission. But, the good thing that came out from this dissertation is that there are still more ensembles outside of royal contexts performing these kind of repertoire, but they are not being recognized, so the repertoire is so hard, so secretive, that not many people know about it, but when you learn repertoire, of course you play it, so you just play it as a musician [*laughs*], and many young, young musicians playing it just for the sake of the music itself, because they can. The skill is there, the repertoire is there, but the occasion is not there. So when they perform, it's for honoring the one who used to play in this ensemble. It's a spot where these skilled musicians are able to do some improvisation in there. Improvisation is not a... how should I say? — Not many people are doing it [*laughs*], they just play as it is, and just a little bit of variation, but not much other improvisation. Only the super skillful musician or the master musician are able to do it, and not embarrass themselves [*laughing*], so that's a really important part, not embarrass themselves. To show off their skill. They are kind of [*at*] the place where they show off. Not many musicians like to see many people showing off [*laughing*]. But still, after my dissertation, after I finished it, there's still more ensembles performing it outside of the royal context. I've seen it on Facebook sometimes, that my friend actually filming it, and then reported it, because I still [*am*] collecting this data. The one thing that's still present in my conclusion in my dissertation is that there are no new repertoires. No new repertoire for these kind of ensembles. So, even though they're playing it at present, but they are still playing the same repertoire. So new creation for these ensembles.

AM: Interesting. Thank you so much for that.

ID: Thank you Dr. Adler. My next question refers back to your mission of repairing the Thai instruments at UCLA. So, I'm wondering how this mission has built any cultural bonds between the Thai communities in Southern California and Thailand.

SA: Great question. Thank you for that [*laughs*]. So, remember when I first mentioned that playing music is not about playing alone, it's also playing with your friends. So, for this

situation, the music of Thailand at UCLA is actually allowing me to invite people to come and play with me with different occasions. For example, when I first finished fixing most of the instruments in our collection, I created a lecture/demo/performance event using the instruments we just newly restored. And I invited musicians in California and Chicago who had some relationship with some kind of traditional Thai music in the US. So, they come together and they perform together. So, we practice a little bit and then they also learned about the history of the musical instruments, and many of them actually know where these musical instruments came from after we gave a talk about it, and they know the teachers in Thailand, so we connected back to Thailand. I picked several repertoire based on David Morton collections, so we also link it to the existing material from the Archive and also have Thai language students sing the words. So, we expanded our own connection, not just for Ethnomusicology, but to the Thai community in Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago, Thailand, also with the Southeast Asia studies on campus. So, we're bringing them together. And we invited the Consulate from Los Angeles to come in. We invited the director — not the director — the President of the Thai club on campus to come in. We invited people who were interested in Thai music, in and out of the Los Angeles area to come and witness this. We also invited Deborah Wong who actually studied Thai music, especially the wai khruu ritual, to come and give a talk about this. We also invited the composers who used Thai traditional music to compose the new song for Thai music outside of Thai music setting, including the Western musical instruments in Western style. So, we talk more broadly about Thai music and toward the end of our performance, we also had a workshop so participants or the audience can just come and try, join us and play with us. That was a successful event, so when we actually had a concert, a spring concert, I always invited them to come and perform with me as a ringer [laughs], because when you teach the student, as I mentioned earlier, it's a long repertoire and it's not easy. We need someone who can actually help to bring the ensemble together. A ringer is important.

ID: Thank you so much, Dr. Adler. I think that brings us to the conclusion of our interview.

AM: Yeah, I think that'll do it.

ID: That was super insightful. Wow, I definitely learned a lot.

SA: I think you're going to have to edit a lot. I'm so sorry about that! [laughing]

AM: No worries, no worries...

ID: No! That was great.

AM: ...I appreciate your insights. Really, really interesting. I'm going to have to think about a lot of it.

48:00

[end of interview]